

**James Madison to Richard Rush, April 21, 1821.
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TO RICHARD RUSH. MAD. MSS.

Apl. 21, 1821

Dear Sir, —Your favor of Novr. 15, came duly to hand, with Mr. Ridgeley's farming Pamphlet; for which I return my thanks.

The inflexibility of G. B. on the points in question with the U. S. is a bad omen for the future relations of the parties. The present commercial dispute, tho' productive of ill humor will shed no blood. The same cannot be said of Impressments & blockades.

I have lately recd. also Mr. Godwin's attack on Malthus, which you were so good as to forward. The work derives some interest from the name of the Author and the singular views he has taken of the subject. But it excites a more serious attention by its tendency to disparage abroad the prospective importance of the U. S. who must owe their rapid growth to the principle combated.¹

¹ See letter to Jefferson June 19, 1786, *ante*, Vol. II., p. 246. The work under discussion was William Godwin's *Of Population; an Enquiry Concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on the Subject*. London, 1820.

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In this Country the fallacies of the Author will be smiled at only unless other emotions should be excited by the frequent disregard of the probable meaning of his opponent, and by the harshness of comments on the moral scope of his doctrine. Mr. G. charges him also with being dogmatical. Is he less so himself? and is not Mr. G. one of the last men who ought to throw stones at Theorists? At the moment of doing it too he introduces one of the boldest speculations in anticipating from the progress of chemistry an artificial conversion of the air the water & earth into food for man of the natural flavour and colour.

My memory does not retain all the features of Mr. Malthus's System. He may have been unguarded in his expressions, & have pushed some of his notions too far. He is certainly vulnerable in assigning for the increase of human food, an arithmetical ratio. In a Country thoroughly cultivated, as China is said to be, there can be *no* increase. And in one as partially cultivated, and as fertile as the U. S. the increase may *exceed* the geometrical ratio. A surplus beyond it, for which

a foreign demand has failed, is a primary cause of the present embarrassments of this Country.

The two cardinal points on which the two Authors are at issue, are 1. the prolific principle in the human race. 2. its actual operation, particularly in the U. S. Mr. G. combats the extent of both.

If the principle could not be proved by direct facts, its capacity is so analogous to what is seen throughout other parts of the animal as well as vegetable domain, that it would be a fair inference. It is true indeed that in the case of vegetables on which animals feed, and of animals the food of other animals, a more extensive capacity of increase might be requisite than in the Human race. But in this case also it is required, over and above the degree sufficient to repair the ordinary wastes of life, by two considerations peculiar to man: one that his reason can add to the natural means of subsistence for an increased

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number, which the instinct of other animals cannot; the other, that he is the only animal that destroys his own species.

Waiving however the sanction of analogy, let the principle be tested by facts, either stated by Mr. G. or which he cannot controvert.

He admits that Sweden has doubled her numbers, in the last hundred years, without the aid of emigrants. Here then there must have been a prolific capacity equal to an increase in ten centuries from 2 millions to 1000 mills.. If Sweden were as populous ten Centuries ago as now, or should not in ten Centuries to come arrive at a thousand millions, must not 998 mills. of births have been prevented; or that number of infants have perished? And from what causes?

The two late enumerations, in England which shew a rate of increase there much greater than in Sweden are rejected by Mr. G. as erroneous. They probably are so; tho' not in the degree necessary for his purpose. He denies that the population increases at all. He even appeals with confidence to a comparison of what it has been with what it is at present as proving a decrease.

There being no positive evidence of the former numbers and none admitted by him of the Present, resort must be had to circumstantial lights; and these will decide the question with sufficient certainty.

As a general rule it is obvious that the quantity of food produced in a country determines the actual extent of its population. The number of people cannot exceed the quantity of food, and this will not be produced beyond the consumption. There are exceptions to the rule; as in the case of the U. S. which export food, and of the W. Indies which import it. Both these exceptions however favor the supposition that there has been an increase of the English population: England adding latterly imported food to its domestic stock, which at one period it diminished by exportation. The question to be decided is whether

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the quantity of food produced the true measure of the population consuming it, be greater or less now than heretofore.

In the savage state where wild animals are the chief food, the population must be the thinnest. Where reared ones are the chief food, as among the Tartars, in a pastoral State, the number may be much increased. In proportion as grain is substituted for animal food a far greater increase may take place. And as cultivated vegetables, & particularly roots, enter into consumption, the mass of subsistence being augmented, a greater number of consumers, is necessarily implied.

Now, it will not be pretended, that there is at present in England more of forest, and less of Cultivated ground than in the feudal or even much later periods. On the contrary it seems to be well understood that the opened lands have been both enlarged & fertilized; that bread has been substituted for flesh; and that vegetables, particularly roots have been more & more substituted for both. It follows that the aggregate food raised & consumed now, being greater than formerly, the number who consume it, is greater also.

The Report to the Board of Agriculture quoted by Mr. G. coincides with this inference. The Animal food of an individual which is the smaller part of it, requires, according to this authority, 2 acres of ground; all the other articles $1\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre only. The report states that a horse requires four acres. It is probable that an ox requires more, being fed less on grain & more on Grass.

It may be said that Horses which are not eaten are now used instead of oxen which were. But the horse as noted is supported by fewer acres than the ox; and the oxen superseded by the horses, form but a small part of the eatable Stock to which they belong. The inference therefore can at most be but slightly qualified by this innovation.

The single case of Ireland ought to have warned Mr. G. of the error he was maintaining. It Seems to be agreed that the population there has greatly increased of late years; altho' it

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receives very few if any emigrants; and has sent out numbers, very great numbers, as *Mr. G. must suppose* , to the U. S.

In denying the increase of the Amn. population, from its own stock, he is driven to the most incredible suppositions, to a rejection of the best established facts, and to the most preposterous estimates & calculations.

He ascribes the rapid increase attested by our periodical lists, wholly to emigrations from Europe; which obliged him to suppose that from 1790, to 1810 150 thousand persons were annually transported; an extravagance which is made worse by his mode of reducing the no. necessary to one half; and he catches at little notices of remarkable numbers landed at particular ports, in particular seasons; as if these could be regarded as proofs of the average arrivals for a long series of years, many of them unfavorable for such transmigrations. In the year 1817, in which the emigrants were most numerous, according to Seybert, they did not in the ten Principal ports where with few if any exceptions they are introduced, exceed 22,240; little more than 1/7 of the average annually assumed.

Were it even admitted that our population is the result altogether of emigrations from Europe, what wd. Mr. G. gain by it?

The Census for 1820 is not yet compleated. There is no reason however, to doubt that it will swell our numbers to about ten millions. In 1790 the population was not quite four millions. Here then has been an increase of six millions. Of these six five millions will have been drawn from the population of G. B. & Ireland. Have the numbers there been reduced accordingly? Then they must have been 30 years ago, greater by 5 millions than at this time. Has the loss been replaced? Then, as it has not been by emigrants, it must have been by an effect of the great principle in question. Mr. G. may take his choice of the alternatives.

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It is worth remarking that N. England which has sent out such continued swarms to other parts of the Union for a number of years, has continued at the same time, as the Census shews to increase in population, altho' it is well known that it has recd. comparatively very few emigrants from any quarter; these preferring places less inhabited for the same reason that determines the course of migrations from N. England.

The appeal to the case of the black population in the U. S. was particularly unfortunate for the reasoning of Mr. G. to which it gives the most striking falsification.

Between the years 1790 & 1810 the number of slaves increased from 694,280 to 1,165,441. This increase at a rate nearly equal to that of the Whites, surely was not produced by *emigrants* from Africa. Nor could any part of it have been imported, (except 30 or 40,000¹ into S. Carolina & Georgia,) the prohibition being every where strictly enforced throughout that period. Louisiana indeed brought an addition amounting in 1810 to 37,671. This no. however (to be reduced by the slaves carried thither from other States prior to 1810) may be regarded as overbalanced by emancipated blacks & their subsequent offspring. The whole number of this description in the Census of 1810, amounts to 186,446.

¹ See for exact no. Senator Smiths speech of last session.— *Madison's Note*.

The evidence of a natural and rapid increase of the Blacks in the State of Virginia is alone conclusive on the subject. Since the Epoch of Independence the importation of slaves has been uniformly prohibited, and the spirit of the people concurring with the policy of the law, it has been carried fully into execution. Yet the number of slaves increased from 292,627 in 1790 to 392,518 in 1810; altho' it is notorious that very many have been carried from the State by external purchases and migrating masters. In the State of Maryland to the North of Virginia whence alone it could be surmised that any part of them could be replaced, there has been also an increase.

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Mr. G. exults not a little (p. 420—2) in the detection of error in a paper

read by Mr. W. Barton in 1791 to the Philosophical Society at Phila. I have not looked for the paper; but from the account of it given by Mr. G. a strange error was committed by Mr. B. not however in the false arithmetic blazoned by Mr. G., but by adding the number of deaths to that of births in deducing the Productiveness of marriages in a certain Parish in Massachusetts. But what is not less strange than the lapsus of Mr. B. is that his critic should overlook the fact on the face of the paper as inserted in his own Page, that the population of the Parish had doubled in 54 years, in spite of the probable removals from an old parish to newer settlements; And what is strangest of all, that he should not have attended to the precise statement in the record, that the number of births within the period exceeded the number of deaths, by the difference between 2,247 and 1,113. Here is the most demonstrable of all proofs of an increasing population unless a Theoretical zeal should suppose that the Pregnant women in the neighbourhood made lying in visits to Hingham, or that its sick inhabitants chose to have their dying eyes closed elsewhere.

Mr. G. has not respected other evidence in his hands, which ought to have opened his eyes to the reality of an increasing population in the U.S. In the population list of Sweden, in the authenticity of which he fully acquiesces as well as in the Census of the U. S. the authenticity of which he does not controvert, there is a particular column for those under ten years of Age. In that of Sweden, the number is to the whole population, as 2,484 to 10,000 which is less than $\frac{1}{4}$. In that of the U. S. the number is as 2,016,704 to 5,862,096, which is more than $\frac{1}{3}$. Now Mr. G. refers (p. 442) to the proportion of the ungrown to the whole population, as testing the question of its increase. He admits & specifies the rate at which the population of Sweden increases. And yet with this evidence of a greater increase of the population of the U. S. he contends that it does not increase at all. An attempt to extricate himself by a disproportion of children or of more productive parents emigrating from Europe, would only plunge him the deeper into contradictions & absurdities.

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Mr. G. dwells on the Indian Establishment at Paraguay by the Jesuits, which is said not to have increased as a triumphant disproof of the prolific principle. He places more faith in the picture of the establishment given by Raynal than is due to the vivid imagination of that Author, or than the Author appears to have had in it himself. For he rejects the inference of Mr. G. and reconciles the failure to increase with the power to increase by assigning two causes for the failure; the small-pox, and the exclusion of individual Property. And he might have found other causes, in the natural love of indolence till overcome by avarice & vanity motives repressed by their religious discipline; in the pride of the men, retaining a disdain of agricultural labour; and in the female habit of prolonging for several years the period of keeping children to the breast. In no point of view can a case marked by so many peculiar circumstances & these so imperfectly known, be allowed the weight of a precedent.

Mr. G. could not have given a stronger proof of the estrangement of his ideas from the Indian character & modes of life than by his referring to the Missouri Tribes, which do not multiply, "altho' they cultivate corn." His fancy may have painted to him fields of Wheat, cultivated by the Plough & gathered into Barns, as a provision for the year. How wd. he be startled at the sight of little patches of Maize & squashes, stirred by a piece of Wood, and that by the Squaws only; the hunters & warriors spurning such an occupation, & relying on the fruits of the Chase for the support of their Wigwams? "Corn Eaters" is a name of reproach given by some tribes to others beginning under the influence of the Whites to enlarge their cultivated spots.

In going over Mr. Gs. volume, these are some of the remarks which occurred; and in thanking you for it, I have made them supply the want of more interesting materials for a letter. If the heretical Work should attract conversations in which you may be involved, some of the facts, which you are saved the trouble of hunting up, may rebut misstatements from misinformed friends or illiberal opponents of our Country.

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You have not mentioned the cost of Godwin's book or the pamphlet of Mr. Rigby. I suspect that they overgo the remnant of the little fund in your hands. If so let me provide for it. You will oblige me also by forwarding with its cost, the Book Entitled "The apocryphal New Testament translated from the Original Tongues," "printed for Wm. Hone Ludgate Hill."